



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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GAO REPORT: CTR BIOLOGICAL WEAPON PROLIFERATION PREVENTION PROGRAM “POSES NEW RISKS” TO THE UNITED STATES

A General Accounting Office (GAO) report released today by House Armed Services Committee chairman Floyd Spence concludes that collaborative programs with Russian scientists in the field of biological research may “exacerbate or create risks” to the United States. These programs, which include joint research on biological defenses, are carried out under the Administration’s “Expanded Threat Reduction Initiative,” and funded in part through the Department of Defense’s Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR, also known as “Nunn-Lugar”) program.

In expressing concern over the report’s findings, Spence said, “This report reinforces my concern that the Administration’s plans to increase assistance to Russia could exacerbate the risk of a renewed Russian offensive biological weapons effort. The CTR program was intended to *reduce* the threat posed by Russia’s weapons of mass destruction, including biological weapons, not *increase* it,” continued Spence. “Congress must carefully evaluate the risks and benefits of this program to ensure that it does not have unintended consequences that could jeopardize the national security of the United States.”

CTR biological weapons proliferation prevention activities were designed to prevent the proliferation of scientific knowledge and biological weapons expertise from Russia to potentially dangerous states. According to GAO (GAO/NSIAD-00-138, “Biological Weapons: Effort to Reduce Former Soviet Threat Offers Benefits, Poses New Risks”), the program presents “key risks” to the United States that include, “sustaining Russia’s existing biological weapons infrastructure, maintaining or advancing Russian scientists’ skills to develop offensive biological weapons, and the potential misuse of U.S. assistance to fund offensive research.” While some measures are being taken to mitigate the risks posed by these collaborative research efforts, GAO concludes “none of these measures... would prevent Russian project participants or institutes from potentially using their skills or research outputs to later work on offensive weapons activities at any of the Russian military institutes that remain closed to the United States.”

In testimony before the House Armed Service Committee in October 1999, Kenneth Alibek, First Deputy Director of the Soviet Union’s massive “Biopreparat” biological weapons program, underscored GAO’s finding when he noted “many of Russia’s former biological weapons facilities have never been subjected to international inspections or even visits by foreign representatives.”

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The CTR program was established to reduce the threat to the United States posed by the former Soviet Union's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. In recent years, Congress has increased its oversight of the program in response to concerns about how it is being implemented and whether it is serving U.S. national security interests as originally intended.

Between fiscal years 1994 and 1999, the United States provided about \$20 million to fund collaborative research projects that redirect former biological weapons scientists to peaceful research activities. Between fiscal years 2000 and 2004, the Administration plans to spend at least \$220 million to expand efforts to engage former Soviet biological weapons institutes.

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